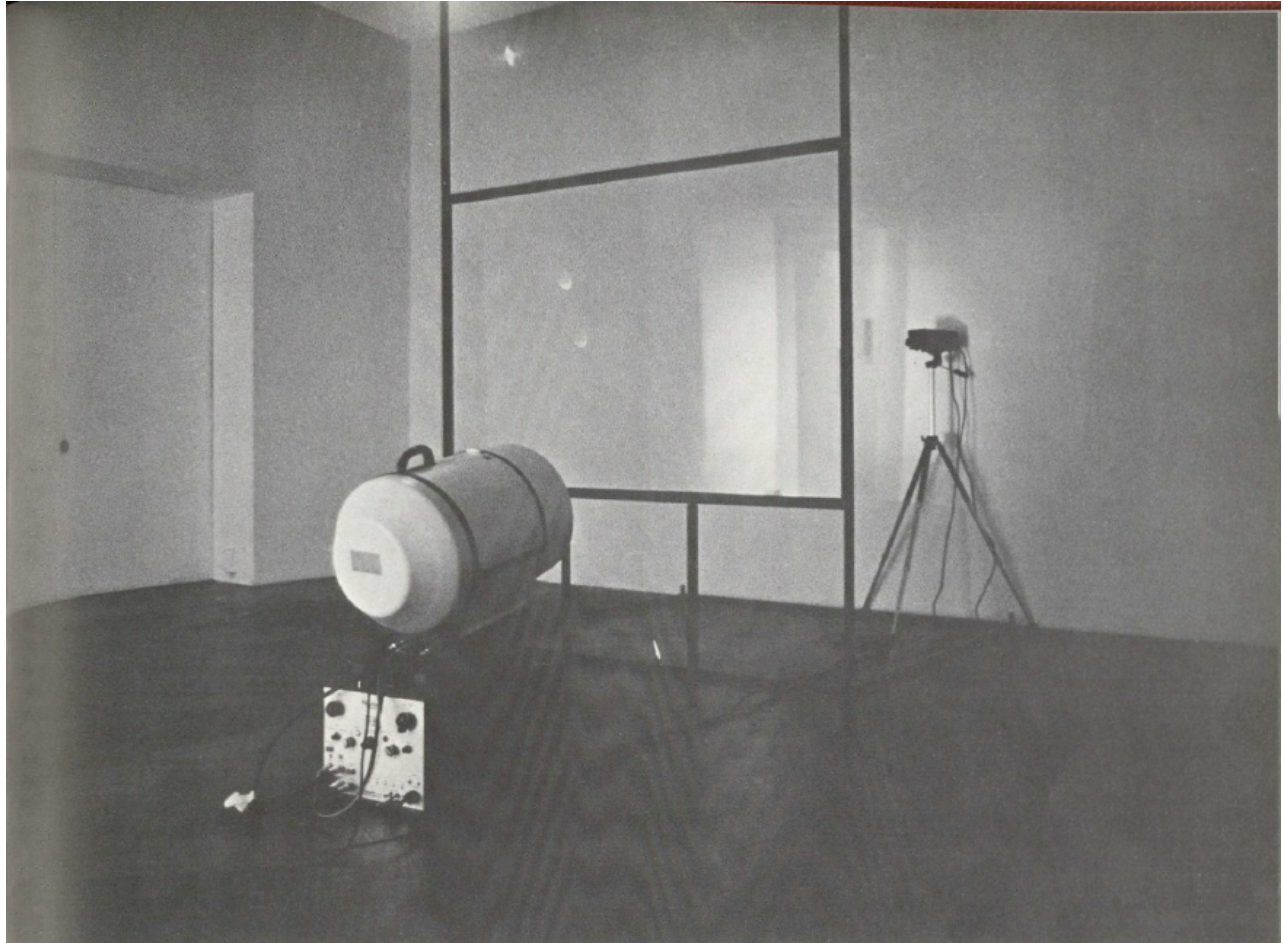


"Fields: Peter Campus"
By Bruce Kurtz

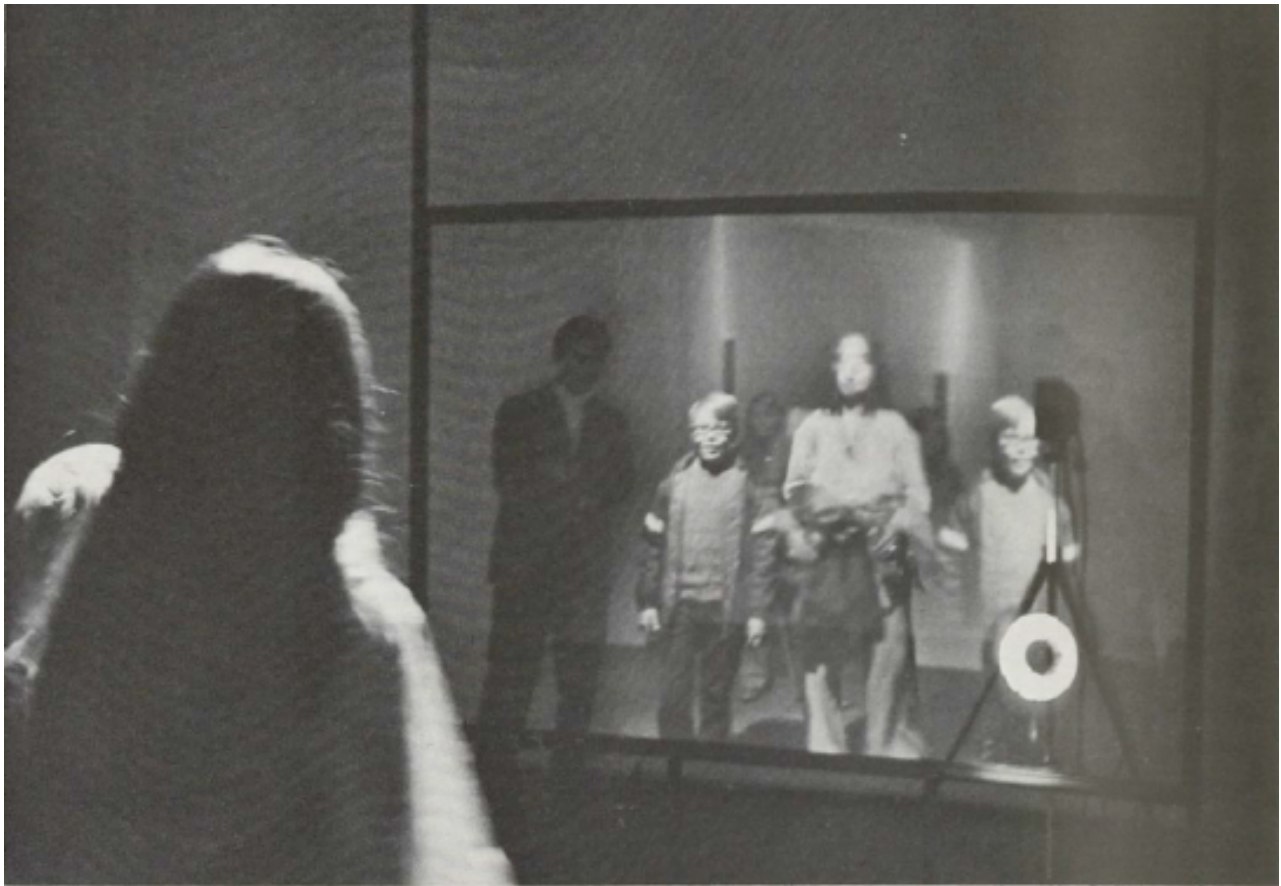
Arts Magazine Vol. 47, No. 7 (May/June 1973): 25-29.



Peter Campus, *Interface* (1972). Installation in Bykert Gallery.

Interface is, effectively, nonexistent until the viewer enters the field. The viewer's physical and perceptual presence participates in the ongoing unfolding of the work, which is never completed. The space does not exist until it is activated by the viewer. A large sheet of glass is set in a metal frame about six feet from a wall. Behind the glass on the right side is a video camera aimed through the glass at the left side. In front of the glass is a video projector, hooked up to the camera, aimed at the right side of the wall behind the glass. A dynamic field exists in the space, though the field is invisible, vacant, until the viewer enters. The viewer enters the field and is reflected in the glass at the same time that his live, life-size video image is projected on the wall behind the glass. The viewer is confronted with three images of himself, all different. One is the biologically familiar image, known as mass in space, the one known from the inside-out, through the senses and thoughts, through daily biological functions, with familiar, routine functions. Another is the reflection in the glass, a purely optical image, one

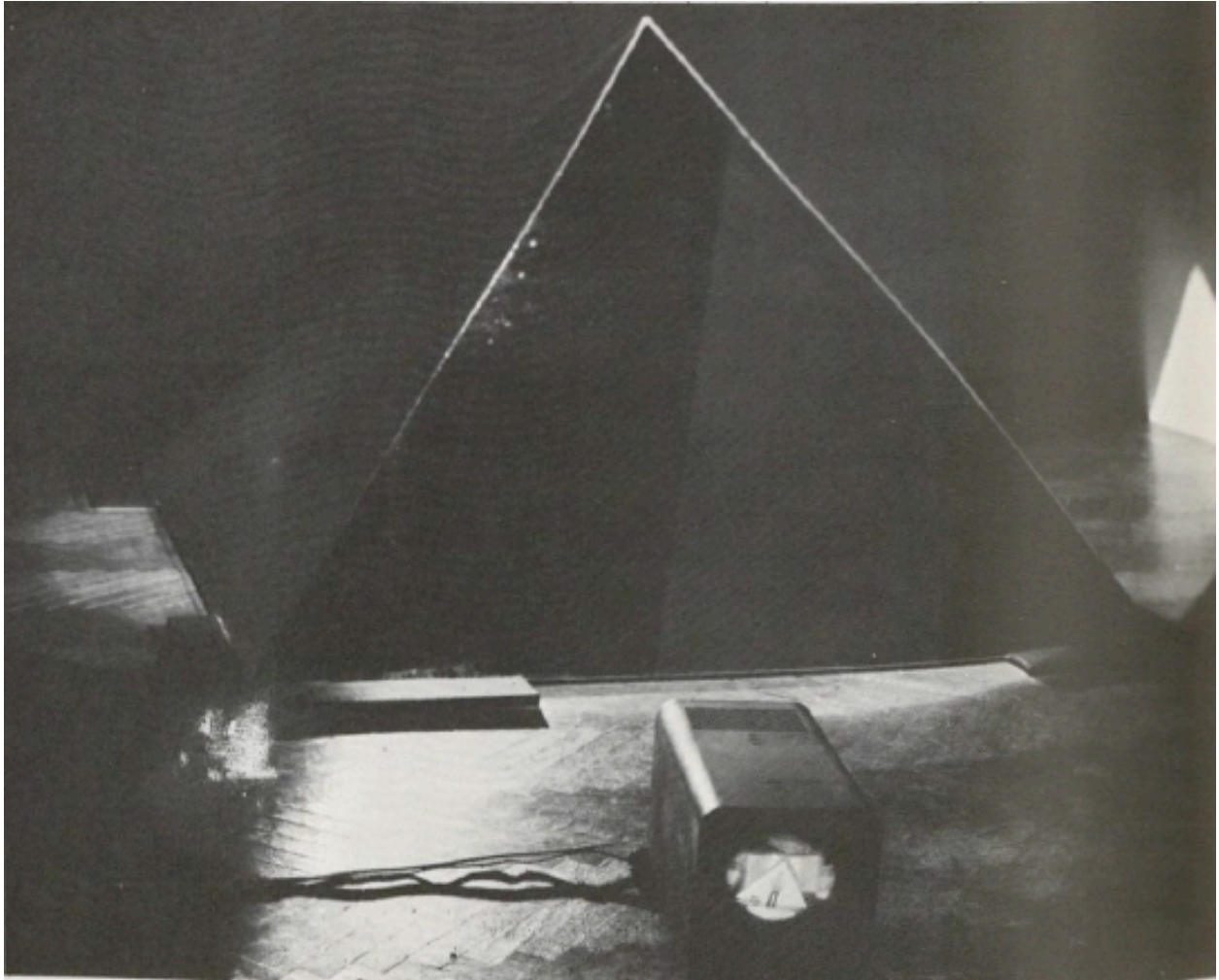
which owes its existence to light reflected on the glass, without mass, touch, etc., known from the outside, measurable only by the eye. The third image is the live, life-size video image, composed of bits of electrical information gathered by the “retina” of the vidicon tube, transmitted as electrical impulses through the “optic nerve” of the cable, decoded by the “brain” of the projector, and perceived in the mind, measurable only as impulses. Three different mental and physical spaces are simultaneously present, as though one is experiencing the process of perception inside-out, looking through one’s retina at the image formed inside one’s brain. The difference is that in our brains we form a composite image of the optical impression translated into impulses transmitted through the optic nerve, “projected” in our brains, and combined with other information—with thought.



Peter Campus, *Interface* (1972). Installation in Bykert Gallery. A change in the position of the viewer projects a change in tension between the glass reflection and the video emanation.

Where does this space exist? In what time does the event take place? One can test the real time occurrence of the event by observing the three images engaged in simultaneous actions, but can one be sure? Which image is the control? Where does the loop begin? Does the event occur now or later, or maybe before? The event occurs in the time/space of thought, which is to say in all time, all immeasurable memory of the viewer, in all space, including here and now, which is everywhere and nowhere. “Our view of objects, other beings, is not a fragmented two or three-dimensional one, but

one in space and time. We can't reproduce it, so we're not aware of it. Its nature is vague in our minds." It is a physical/mental space, ultimately immeasurable.

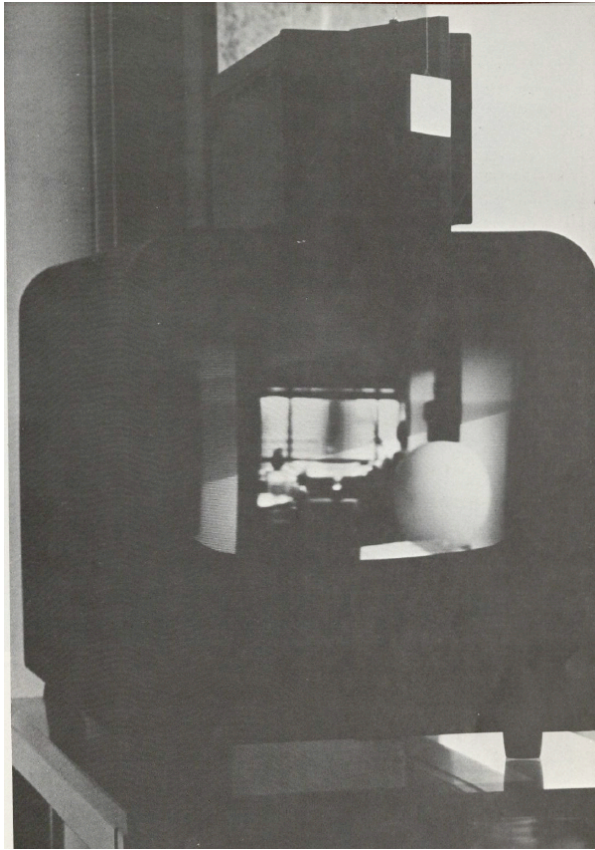


Peter Campus, *Mer* (1972). Installation in Bykert Gallery. Mer is the ancient Egyptian word for a pyramid whose proportions reveal the value for pi and the golden mean. The camera/light-pyramid-monitor forms an optical system which only transcends experience at a specific point of alignment within the sector of the monitor.

The surface of this work is as elusive as the time location of the space. While the time of the event and the space of its location are perceived as being somewhere outside the usual range of physical occurrences at the same time that the real time of live video is experienced, the actual surface of the work is seen on the surface of the glass and on the wall at the same time that it is observed to fill the space, to occur between the reflections and projections, in the dynamic fields between the images. The images are physically and tangibly there, but on closer look they are as tangibly present in the space that they do not occupy as they are within their own boundaries. In fact, the nature of the space owes its existence to ways in which surface, the surface of the images, disperses itself throughout it: surface as space.

In its surface characteristics, *Interface* is a kind of summary of recent pictorial tendencies. In the urge toward greater factualism, painters such as Brice Marden and Robert Rauschenberg have expunged from painting all but the most elemental gesture and color and have maximized the surface of the canvas; the surface of the canvas is, even more emphatically than formerly, asserted as the space of the painting. Other painters, like the Realists, have returned to an illusionism that asserts the canvas as a picture of the world, not just of itself, with the edges of the format alluding to a combination of a magazine photograph and an open window. The glass of *Interface* is analogous to the predicament of surface or illusionism, a painterly problem, but *Interface* deals with the issue not by giving us the illusion either that we can or cannot look through the surface, though these are options we can choose, but by actually *moving us through the surface*, and by moving our surface through the space, a rather sculptural response to a current painterly issue. But more, it is a response that identifies the medium of video as neither painterly nor sculptural, rather, with unique properties.

Of course the work would have been impossible without the medium of video, especially, in this case, without the live feedback of video but impossible too without the unique property of video as an image-making mentality which codes optical information into electrical impulses and reconstructs those impulses into optical information. In the process of the coding and decoding, a nearly instantaneous time event occurs which completely alters the space, as we have seen.



Peter Campus, *Kiva* (1971). The relationship between mirrors and monitor forms an open-ended equation postulating higher spatial dimensions.

Other connotations of medium are present in *Interface*, too, as the experience of the work becomes a means to a communication with oneself, as though one is communicating through a mediumistic being. I wrote earlier, "the glass, on which the viewer's image is reflected, through which he is seen by the camera, and through which the video image is projected, is an intermediary between the viewer and himself."¹ Even more precisely, the process of video, which is continuous, is the medium. Thus, the form of the work is identical with its meaning, allying it with the most tenaciously formalistic art, though *Interface* is not by any means solely self-referential: the complete unity of form and meaning is also characteristic of mystical experience.

The mediumistic character of *Interface* allies it to Duchamp's *The Bridge Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* or *The Large Glass*. In both works, the event that occurs is a transmutation, a passage from one state to another, in which the viewer participates, and which occurs in a time-space that is not clearly locatable. Another curious parallel is that neither of the works were, nor ever will be, completed, as by the nature of their content they are continuous.² Finally, of course, they both deal with complex metaphysical issues.

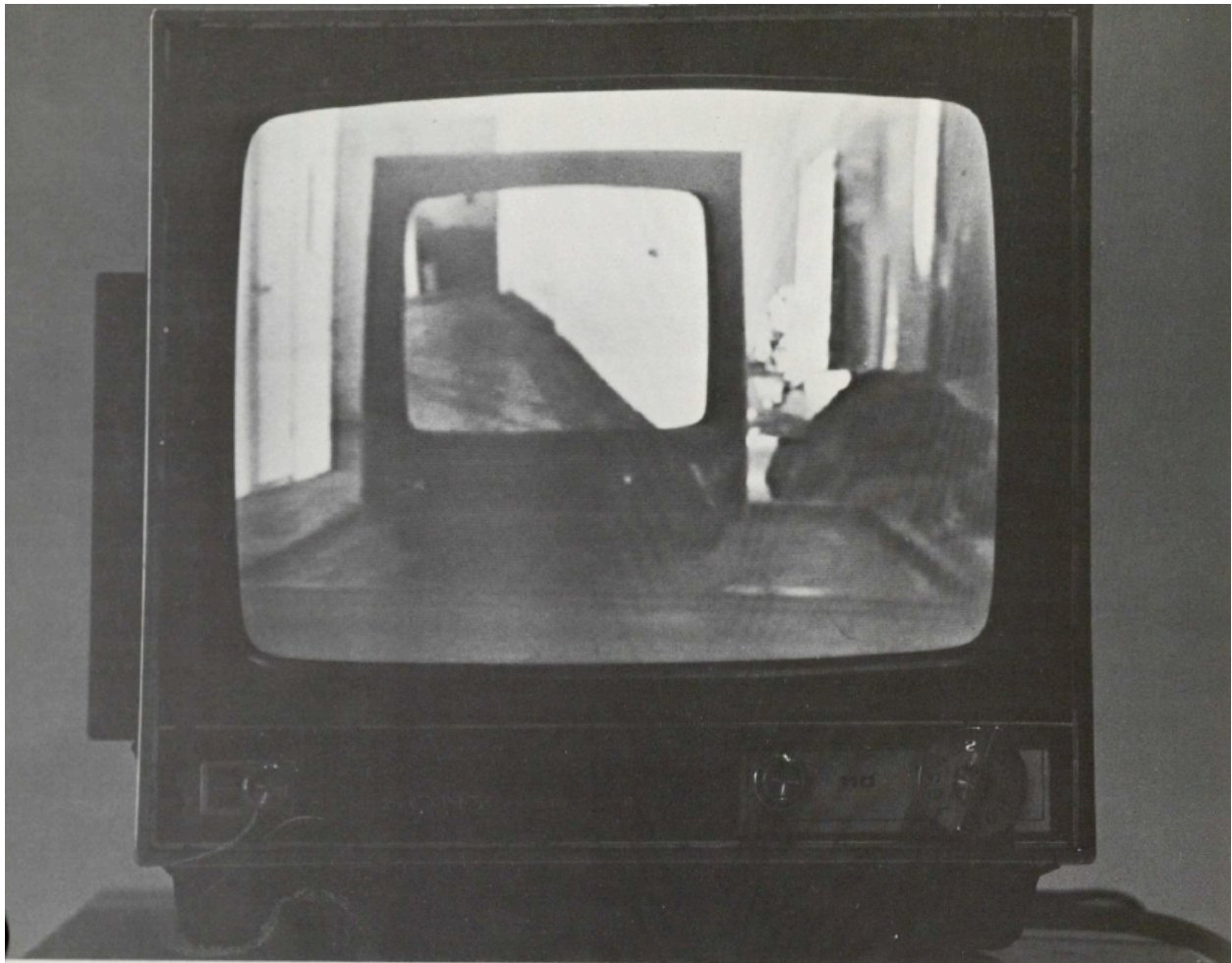
The appealing simplicity and clarity of the forms of their works, yet their obscurity and abstruseness, ally the work of Duchamp and Campus. Unlike Duchamp, though, Campus is challenging without being remote. One frequently experiences with Duchamp the feeling of a rarefied, high-altitude airlessness, or at least recent writers would lead us to believe so.³

A particular kind of physical and conceptual dematerialization of the image also characterizes both the work of Duchamp and Campus: traces of recognition emerge and then dissolve into other a-perceptive patterns perhaps disconnected in other than sequence, but who knows?

Both Duchamp and Campus deal with their versions of the methodology of science, too. Duchamp constantly mutates and confounds our preconceptions of certainty, based on our reliance on cause and effect relationships characteristic of scientific inquiry. For example, with *Three Standard Stoppages*, Duchamp scientifically demonstrates that a meter, in effect, is not a meter. Duchamp's concern with making non-logic out of logic and logic out of non-logic is allied to Campus's concern with extending scientific inquiry into realms that strain its premises. The result is the identification of formerly unrecognized realms of experience which are not accessible through existing methodologies.

There are formal similarities, also, in both artists' use of glass, mirrors, pyramids, reflections, lenses,⁴ and forms that deal with alterations of optical impressions.⁵ Both artists make use of common materials, frequently not formerly commonly associated with art, and of simple forms.

There are important differences, of course between Duchamp and Campus. The most basic difference is that while Duchamp's inquiries are essentially linguistic in character, Campus emphasizes the experiential, which means the body and *all* its senses.



Peter Campus, *Double Vision* (1971), "Inside the Radius," videotape. Two concentric views of the same space. The outer view is static, the inner view is active, referring back out to complete, to unify.

The experiential emphasis of Campus's thinking is evidenced as early as the late 50s, when he was a student of experimental psychology at Ohio State University, graduating with a B.S. in 1960. The relationship between thought and various controlled influences on it is central both to the discipline of experimental psychology and to Campus's art, but in retrospect Campus found a regard for other than physically measurable influences lacking in his early scientific training. "But when one looks again in a deeper way there are unknowns."

Campus's art, though frequently dealing with scientific principles, extends the experiential and experimental into the dynamic fields between thought and the physical world. In short, into intuition. His art is insistent on a process of identifying and making observable intuitions into those fields, which he delves into with an undramatic, apparent objectivity and straight-forwardness, allying his art with the methodology of

science and with the scientific attitude that only that which is demonstrated as being physically and tangibly present is real. The difference is that Campus demonstrates as physically and tangibly present that which science denies as real. He also believes in visions, astral projection, and the *I Ching*.

Peter Campus is a video artist, but video is not the subject of his art. Video is a tool with certain characteristics which Campus uses to realize an attitude toward content, one which permits dealing with metaphysics without being anecdotal. Campus uses video as the means of bringing into being experiences which reveal relationships between how we perceive and intuition. His work requires careful reflection and invites meditation.

Levels of different images describing layers of experience merge or divide, come into being or disappear, overlap or suddenly separate. Three life-size, simultaneous, real-time images of oneself are confronted. The viewer experiences various physical sensations while sitting in a chair viewing a videotape on a monitor: loss of balance, dangling in air, transparency. Expectations of experiences are constantly confounded, requiring the viewer to constantly probe the relationships between the physical world and the non-physical world, between sense perceptions and thoughts, concluding with a new awareness of their convergence, through video: "I fabricate instruments to reveal relationships."

Campus did not set out to be an artist, but arrived at art through a rather circuitous route: B.S. Ohio State University, 1960; the film business, including two T.V. series (filmed, 1963-70); in 1970 a commissioned videotape for the Metropolitan Museum of Art; in 1970, videotapes; and in 1971 the first video environments. Campus arrived at art not as an end in itself but as a means of dealing with issues that are not accessible through the means or through the conditions of established working processes. This is important because it identifies the extent of Campus's interest in purely aesthetic or formal issues in relation to communication processes, their means, conditions, meanings. All this emerged very slowly, as can be seen by the chronology, but it arrived at an interest in the process of communication between an individual and himself, between an individual and his environment, and between their convergence, hardly the subject matter of a T.V. series. It should be added that once Campus's current interest did emerge, it developed very quickly, as he didn't begin making art until 1970.

During approximately the last four years, the period encompassing Peter Campus's emergence as an artist, a number of major artists have concerned themselves with relationships between art and other forms of thinking⁶--Charles Ross, Dorothea Rockburne, Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, Vito Acconci, and Andy Warhol, to identify the range and potential quality of this kind of investigation.

Carter Ratcliff has recently written about the following artists' pieces at Documenta V: "What sets Serra, Nauman, and Asher apart is that their pictorialism connects vision to the full range of perception. Vision becomes an aspect of the body's presence in a particular place—it cannot be 'transported' or abstracted from the flow of ordinary

experience...This is new in contemporary art, though it has been attempted often enough in environmental works.”⁷ The same can be said for Peter Campus’s works, and more—the full range of perception, including intuition, becomes an aspect of the body’s presence in a particular space.



Peter Campus, *Dynamic Field Series*, #9 (1971), videotape. The retina is the most primitive part of the eye, evolved from touch.

All that has been said about *Interface* regarding time, space, and dematerialization applies to *Kiva* as well, but *Kiva* deals more specifically with the eye as the primary sensory agent for locating the event in space and time, which is to say for locating oneself in space and time in relation to the event. *Kiva* attracted crowds at the Whitney Biennial, as spectators were fascinated to see themselves reflected through the mirrors or picked up directly by the camera, then seen on the monitor only to disappear the next moment, as the mirrors turned. With the disappearance of the image as affirmation of their presence the question became, “Where am I now?” With the vision of the camera as eye terminated, the ability to locate in space was lost. All-at-onceness.

Questions of inside and outside are also raised by *Kiva*. While the system is a loop, hence is closed, its parameters constantly shift to include or exclude that which was formerly outside or inside it. The inside at the outside are identified as identical as the

system closes and opens. Inside-outness. "It is not the world out there and me in here but the two combined."

The constantly shifting visual patterns of *Kiva* are too complex to be retained by the visual memory, but one's experience of the work is nonetheless cumulative. If the images cannot be visually recalled, what remarks the events as having taken place? One acquires a knowledge of the space of *Kiva* similar to that which allows one to move through a familiar space in the dark, without vision. It is a kind of memory that has to do with time in relation to space and with the sense of touch, both of which are maximized in *Kiva*, and which are characteristic of video.

Space and tactile sensation are dealt with in Campus's videotapes as well. Videotape is very different from the live video environments that we have been discussing because in video tapes the process of video is less apparent, the scale of the image is much smaller because it is seen on a monitor, and the time is delayed rather than live so that the viewer does not participate in the unfolding of the work. However, Campus uses these conditions to his advantage in controlling one's feeling of physical relationship to the space. In the *Dynamic Field* series the monitor itself, as an object, functions as a stabilizing device while we see on its screen images which move in ways that warp the space that we are in, so much that we even lose our balance at times. In *Walking Up*, the artist walks across a wooden floor, occasionally stepping on rugs, pillows, etc., but most of the time just across a bare wooden floor, holding a camera aimed at the floor. The image on the video monitor is seen from the point of view of the artist, so that it appears that we are walking up the floor, and since the monitor does not move, we experience a sensation of moving as we do in a moving car when the landscape appears to move while the car appears to stand still. The tactile character of video is translated into the tactile character of video is translated into the tactile experience of walking. As in the video environments, the experience is so convincing that it challenges our predictable and automatic responses to most events and causes us to question the relationship between our thoughts and perceptions.

Excerpts from Conversations with Peter Campus

...In *Interface* the materials I use are things we take for granted, things we know, at least know in the scientific sense. But when one looks again in a deeper way there are unknowns. We take for granted the imaginary occupants and structures within mirrors. We assume our relationship to them, show no surprise when this being before us moves with some correlation to the movements of our self. In the same way we are used to seeing beings drawn from the electricity that surrounds us formed on the surface of our television sets. The combination of the two makes their unknowns visible and forms a third situation that deals with the projection and reflection of self in finite space.

...We believe when we move through a room we are in motion relative to the room rather than the room in motion relative to us. Thus, we take an outside point of view. In my video tapes, *Dynamic Field Series*, I use the video camera/monitor to take the

outside view. But the video has no mechanism to correlate its movement through space to its image movement and thus cancels them, such as we have in our brains. So one has the option of seeing the video image in motion relative to the monitor fixed in space. This isolates the eye from the eye-brain to approach the relative view, rather than the outside view, of our surroundings.

...In *Kiva* I make this outside view simultaneous with the viewer. It is an extension of the room, an object defined in space, acting on the space. It generates a continuously changing perspective, a sum of views from points fixed in space and time. The mirrors suspended in front of the camera rotate forming cylinders with their paths, accumulating images. The viewer intermittently passes from view, and occupies the screen in cycles of discrete time.

...In *Optical Sockets* I again set up a field. The viewer enters to activate this field, to complete the work. His location relative to the three-dimensional field is translated into the pattern of quadruple image overlays on the two-dimensional screen. This relationship of flat to volumed space exists throughout my work. They finally form an open-ended equation postulating higher spatial dimensions.

...Of course I am interested in perception. It was my field of study in school. It is a way of dealing with things as whole. It is not the world out there and me in here but the two combined.

...Our view of objects, other beings, is not a fragmented two- or three-dimensional one, but one in space and time. We can't reproduce it, so we're not aware of it; its nature is vague in our minds.

...I fabricate instruments to reveal relationships. My work has surface. I like that surface, drawing the viewer in. But it is just a door to the larger work.

¹ Bruce Kurtz, "Video is Being Invented," **Arts Magazine**, December/January, 1973,

² Duchamp said he, "unfinished," **The Large Glass** in 1923, and, as previously noted in this essay, about **Interface**, "The viewer's physical and perceptual presence participates in the ongoing unfolding of the work, which is never finished."

³ Willis Domingo and Jack Burnham, in **Artforum** and **Arts Magazine**, respectively.

⁴ Duchamp's **To be Looked at With One Eye Close to for Almost an Hour**, in the Museum of Modern art, includes a lense.

⁵ Duchamp's **Rotoreliefs**, for example, and Campus's videotapes **Walking Up, Suspended Camera**, and **Cutting Plastic**.

⁶ Mathematics; mathematics; philosophy; geological, social, and art history; personal psychology; and mass media, respectively. For Campus, the fields are experimental psychology and communication.

⁷ Carter, Ratcliff, "Adversary Spaces," **Artforum**, October, 1972, Page 43.